

MILITARY COLLECTOR & HISTORIAN

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Vol. II, No. 3

COMPANY OF
SEPTEMBER 1950

THE AMERICAN CAVALRY SABER OF THE REVOLUTION

by Harold L. Peterson

The primary weapon of the American cavalryman during the Revolutionary War was his saber. Of secondary importance were his firearms, either carbine or pistols or both. Other weapons were proposed from time to time, it is true. Virginia regulations of 1776 called for a carbine, a pair of pistols, a tomahawk and a spear to be issued to each trooper; and Washington planned in the summer of 1777 to convert some of the light horse into lancers. The extent to which these plans were carried out is not known, but the lance and the tomahawk never seriously competed with sword and gun in widespread use.¹

In the decision between the saber and the gun for precedence as the number one weapon for mounted troops in any engagement, the saber was the almost unanimous choice of all trained cavalry leaders. It was on the quality of his sword and his skill in using it that the trooper placed his reliance. Pistols and carbines served their purpose on picket duty and when dismounted, but once he was in formation the cavalryman had no use for them. Henry Lee, the famous "Light Horse Harry", expressed himself forcefully on the subject:

The fire of cavalry is at best innocent, especially in quick action . . . The strength and activity of the horse, the precision and celerity of evolution, the adroitness of the rider, boot-top to boot-top, and the keen edge of the sabre, with fitness of ground and skill in the leader, constitute their vast power so often decisive in the day of battle.²

Epaphras Hoyt, a cavalry captain from Massachusetts who became famous after the War for his military treatises, summed up the situation as follows:

It is generally agreed by experienced officers, that fire arms are seldom of any great utility to cavalry in an engagement, while they are drawn up in regiments,

squadrons, or other considerable bodies: Indeed there is little hope of success from any who begin their attack with the fire of carbines or pistols; numerous examples could be cited from military history to show their inefficacy. It is by the right use of the sword they are to expect victory: This is indisputably the most formidable and essentially useful weapon of cavalry: Nothing decides an engagement sooner than charging briskly with this weapon in hand. By this mode of attack, a body of cavalry will generally rout one that receives it with pistols ready to fire.³

These dicta were not confined to paper, but were translated into action by their authors and by such other noted cavalry leaders as William Washington, whose stinging charges at Cowpens and Guilford Courthouse caused Congress to strike a medal in his behalf.

The sabers which the American horsemen valued so highly were not of any one single pattern. Swords were frequently in short supply, and it was necessary to make use of the best that could be had. Often this meant using old swords which were already in colonial arsenals, captured British specimens, or any other cutting sword which could be obtained. The older colonial swords were of a variety of designs, usually straight-bladed and often basket hilted. The swords of the British cavalry differed, according to the regulations of the various regiments; some straight, some curved, some with half-basket hilts, some with single knuckle bows, some iron mounted and some brass mounted.⁴

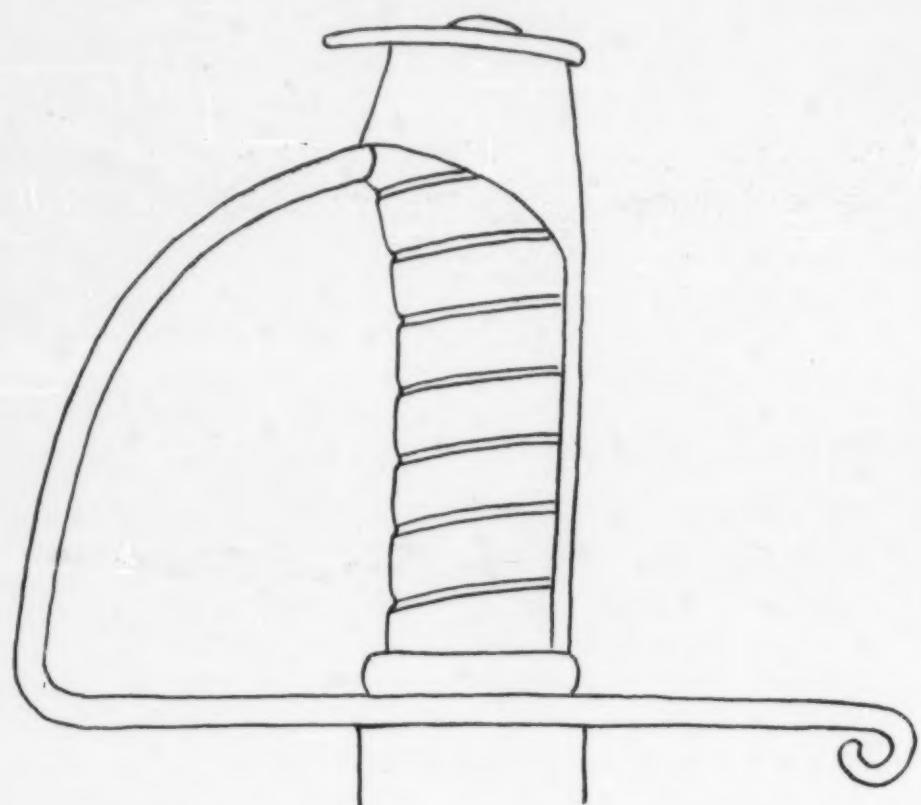
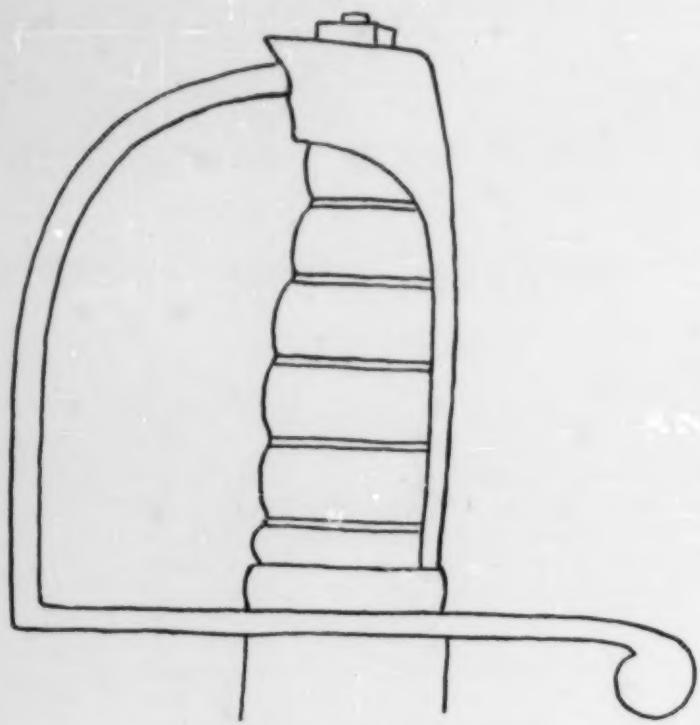
Despite this necessary heterogeneity among American swords, however, there is considerable evidence that one pattern—a slightly curved blade, iron mounted, with a simple stirrup guard—greatly exceeded all others in popularity. A detailed survey of some seventy public and private collections in the East and Middle West has revealed a number of examples of this type of saber,

¹ An ordinance to supply certain defects in a former ordinance of this convention for raising six troops of horse, May 1776, William G. Henning, *Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia*, 13 vols., various places and dates, IX, 142. Washington to Gen. Thomas Mifflin, June 10, 1777, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, 39 vols., Washington, 1931-1944, VIII, 222. Washington to Board of War, June 20, 1777, *ibid.*, 272.

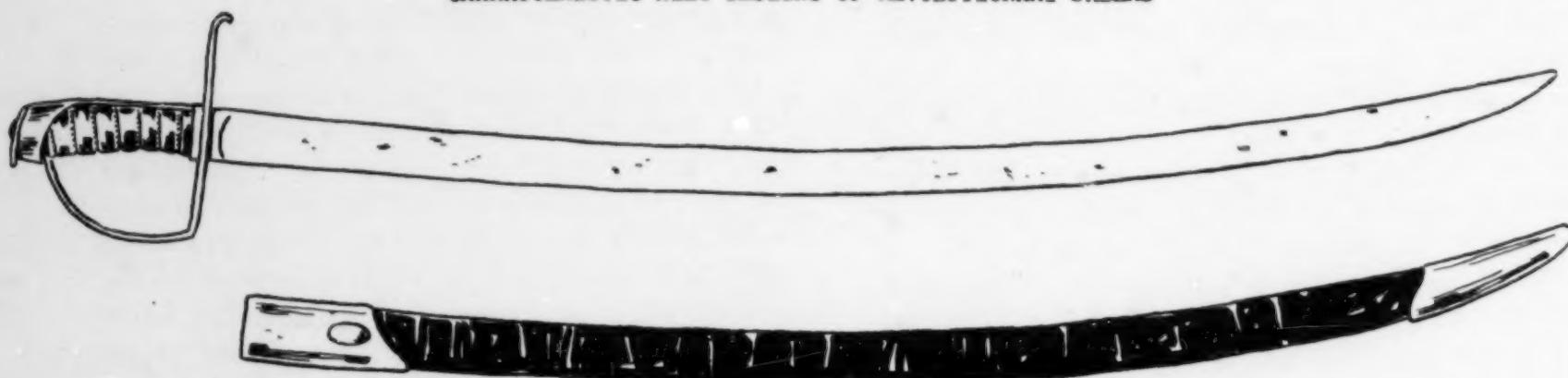
² Henry Lee, *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department*, New York, 1869, 91n.

³ Epaphras Hoyt, *A Treatise on the Military Art*, Brattleborough, 1798, 101. For other dicta by Hoyt on the same subject see page 133.

⁴ There have been frequent articles and pictures illustrating the British light horse sabers in the *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research of Great Britain*. R. Hinde, *Discipline of the Light Horse*, London, 1778, *passim*. Charles Foulkes and E. C. Hopkinson, *Sword, Lance and Bayonet*, Cambridge, 1938, 48-50.



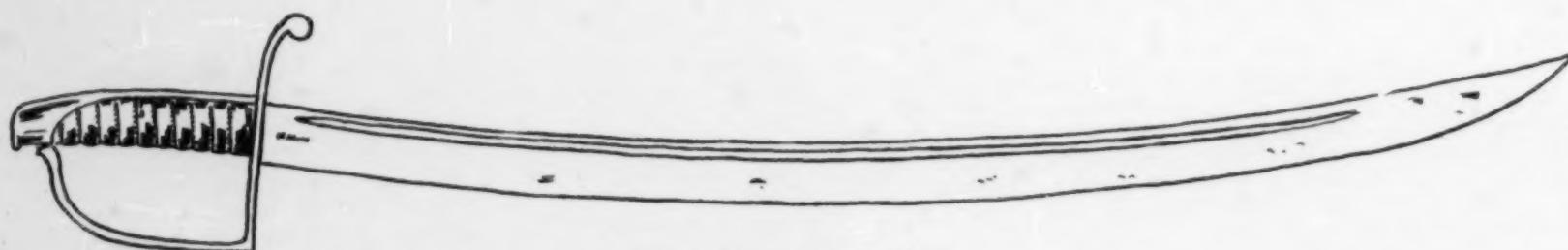
CHARACTERISTIC HILT DESIGNS OF REVOLUTIONARY SABERS



REVOLUTIONARY SABER IN THE HOPKINS COLLECTION



SABER 1783-1800, MORRISTOWN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



STARR SABER MODEL 1798

1 FOOT

fpt

many of them with well authenticated records of use by cavalry in the Revolution. All of these appeared to be of American manufacture. Only two straight-bladed, double-edged swords of a type which could possibly be associated with the British light horse of the 1750's and '60's were found. Both of these were obviously of foreign manufacture, and both were in the collections of the New York Historical Society. The fact that so many of the stirrup-guarded sabers were found in such widely scattered parts of the country and that slight differences in design and manufacturing techniques indicated different makers, plus the fact that no other sabers with definite histories as Revolutionary cavalry arms were found, is a strong indication of the popularity of that design.

In addition to the testimony offered by the survival rate, there are also scattered bits of documentary evidence. William Mercer in his famous painting of the battle of Princeton clearly shows this slightly curved saber in the hands of the First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry. This painting was made a few years after the battle, it is true, but most of Mercer's other and more easily verifiable details are correct, and at the very least it indicates a type of sword with which the artist was familiar about the end of the Revolution. Also, it is stated that the men of Lauzun's and Pulaski's Legions were armed with a "Hussar sword of 36 inches". These troops were largely armed with imported French weapons, and if the term "Hussar sword" can be taken literally, it would mean a sword with a stirrup guard and a slightly curved blade in all respects except quality of workmanship similar to the American sabers described above. After the battle of Guilford Courthouse James Hunter, who apparently furnished many of the American cavalry with their sabers, received from William Washington a saber which had been captured from Tarleton's troops as a specimen of the type of sword desired for the American horse. Within a year Hunter reported that he had 1,000 of these swords "in hand". If the sword in the famous full length portrait of Tarleton engraved shortly after the surrender at Yorktown can be accepted as evidence of the arms carried by his men, then these swords too were stirrup hilted with slightly curved blades.⁵

All of the above documentary evidence is inconclusive, and the interpretation of some of it may be open

⁵ Tench Coxe to Henry Dearborn, October 29, 1807, James E. Hicks, *United States Ordnance*, 2 vols., Mount Vernon, New York, 1940, II, 142. Coxe says Lutzerne's Legion, but obviously means Lauzun's. Maurice Bottet, *L'Arme Blanche de Guerre Française Au XVIIIe Siècle*, Paris, 1910, 46-49. Mjr. Richard Call to Governor of Virginia, March 29, 1781, William P. Palmer and H. W. Fluornoy, editors, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 11 vols., Richmond, 1875-1893, I, 605. James Hunter to Col. O. Towles, November 22, 1781, *ibid.*, II, 618.

to question. Nevertheless, there is enough of it to add support to the survival record. Additional, though circumstantial, evidence can be found in the fact that the same pattern continued in favor after the Revolution, and the first U. S. contract sabers were of the same general style. In the collections of the New York Historical Society and in the museum at Morristown National Historical Park are specimens of this saber engraved with an eagle and stars plus sprigs and trophies in the style characteristic of the last years of the 18th century. In 1798 when Nathan Starr received his first government contract for cavalry sabers he followed this same familiar pattern just as in his earliest cutlass contract, antedating the well-known 1808, he followed the design of the Revolutionary cutlass. Finally, William Rose in his contract of 1807 also adhered to the same model.⁶

In the light of the above evidence, it would seem safe to draw certain conclusions. Because of the short supply and because of the many sources from which weapons were obtained, American troopers carried a variety of swords, particularly during the early years of the war. Among American-made swords the most popular was the iron mounted saber with the slightly curved blade and the stirrup guard. Just how widespread the use of this model became cannot be determined, but it was used by a number of different cavalry organizations and made by many different smiths in different parts of the Colonies; and the number of surviving specimens indicates a large number of swords originally manufactured. Finally, the model was popular enough to survive the years after the Revolution and serve as the basis for the first official U. S. cavalry sabers.⁷

Descriptions of a Few Typical Specimens of the Stirrup-Hilted Saber

All swords described have the following feature in common: slightly curved blade; iron mountings, consisting of a ferrule at the base of the grip, a convex strip surmounting the grip, flat pommel, and stirrup guard.

Saber used by Epaphras Hoyt, the famous cavalryman mentioned in the text. Overall length, 41½ inches; blade 36½ inches. No fuller. Tang of the blade is secured at the pommel with a nut. Grips are of ribbed wood covered with leather. There are no wire wrappings

⁶ James E. Hicks, *Nathan Starr*, Mount Vernon, New York, 1940, 19-24. Hicks, *U. S. Ordnance*, II, 142-146. Harold L. Peterson, "The American Cutlass", *Bulletin of the Society of American Sword Collectors*, III, No. 2 (October 1949), 9-15.

⁷ For other studies of the American cavalry saber in the Revolution see Russell F. Stryker, Jr., "The American Trooper's Saber", *Bulletin of the Society of American Sword Collectors*, III, No. 1 (June 1949), 6-16; and Alfred F. Hopkins, "The Long Horsemen's Sword", *ibid.*, III, No. 4 (April 1950), 2-8.

left, and there may never have been any. Quillon terminates above blade in a disc. Location: Memorial Hall, Deerfield, Massachusetts. There are two other sabers of this type in the same collection.

Somewhat crude "blacksmith" version. Overall length 39 inches; blade, 34 inches. No fuller. Tang of blade secured at the pommel with a nut. Grips of plain wood. Quillon terminates above blade in a disc through which a hole has been drilled. Location: Greenfield Historical Society, Massachusetts.

Saber with scabbard. Overall length, 41½ inches; blade, 36 inches. No fuller. End of tang riveted at pommel. Grips are of ribbed wood covered with leather and wound with seven single strands of rope-twisted wire. Quillon terminates above blade in a simple curl. The scabbard is of dark brown leather, sewn medially on its inner surface with a mattress stitch. The outer surface bears a double line of narrow tooling near each edge with a zigzag pattern in the double line between.

The throat and ferrule (chape) are of iron shaped at their margins. On the throat is a large oval stud for attachment to frog. Marks: "V" on reverse of blade near hilt. Location: Alfred F. Hopkins Collection.¹

Virginia Saber. Nothing is known of the history of this saber, and there is some possibility that it is post-Revolutionary. Nevertheless, it is included as an interesting specimen because of its marks and the fact that the blade has a fuller. Overall length, 38 inches; blade 32½ inches. There is a broad shallow fuller running almost the entire length of the blade at the back. End of tang riveted at pommel. Grip of ribbed wood covered with leather and wound with five strands of twisted brass wire. Marks: "REG^t, VIRG^a / CAVALRY / ESSEX" in three lines on the obverse of the blade. Location: New Haven Colony Historical Society, Connecticut.

¹This description is based on Hopkins, "Long Horsemen's Sword". The sword itself has not been examined by the writer.

THE PLATES

ST. LOUIS GRAYS, 1832-1858

(Plate No. 26)

This famous organization was formed in St. Louis in 1832 and is the direct ancestor of the present 138th Infantry Regiment of that city.¹ The Grays were not the first Volunteer Militia company to be organized in St. Louis. They were, however, the only such company in 1832, for all earlier units had by then been disbanded. It got off to a good start by having as its captain Alton R. Easton, a West Pointer, a tough field soldier, and a first class leader of men.

The Grays took the lead in forming the St. Louis Legion in 1843, and Easton was made its colonel. The company, however, maintained a distinctive existence until the Civil War as a part of the Legion and of its successor, the 1st Missouri Regiment. When the 1st Missouri was captured at Camp Jackson on 10 May 1861 by Nathaniel Lyon's newly raised German militia, most of the demobilized company—strongly sympathetic with the cause of the South—quit St. Louis for Memphis,

Tennessee, where they helped form the 1st Missouri Infantry Regiment, C. S. A. This celebrated regiment, whose Confederate battle honors are also carried today by the 138th Infantry, fought through the Civil War until its capture at Fort Blakely, Alabama, in April 1865.

Hyde and Conrad have this to say about the uniform of the St. Louis Grays:

The uniform of the company, designed by Samuel Willi, was of light gray cloth, single-breasted, swallow-tail coat, black facing on skirt, with black collar and cuffs, silver braid trimmings and silver-plated buttons, with a raised spread-eagle on each button; trousers of same material as coats, with inch and a half black stripe down the seams, white cross and waist belts; the hats were tall, black; bell-shaped, patent leather, with a diamond-shaped silver plate having a gilt eagle ornament in the center on the front of each; chin-straps with silvered scales; tall plume of white feathers; and epaulets were gray, with white fringe to match the cross belts. Officers wore double-breasted coats, morocco leather belts, red silk sashes and long, straight sword.²

This uniform was worn until 1858 when a more modern style was adopted—gray trimmed with light blue, with a cap bearing an "A" to indicate the company's designation within the 1st Missouri Regiment.

¹There are several histories of the St. Louis Grays, but the facts about its earlier history, as well as about the 1st Missouri Infantry into which it was merged, are succinctly given in Military Council of Missouri, *History of the Missouri National Guard*, n.p., 1934; and William Hyde and H. L. Conrad, *Encyclopedia of History of St. Louis*, New York and Louisville, 4 vols., 1899, III, 1496-1518.

²Encyclopædia, 1490.



Joseph Boyce, St. Louis Grays, circa 1855. Courtesy, the Missouri Historical Society.

The Missouri Historical Society owns a water-color copy of a daguerreotype of about 1855, which is reproduced here. It shows "Joseph Boyce in uniform of St. Louis Greys." His cap is at least eleven inches high, although so crudely rendered that it is hard to tell whether or not it was that size in the original. The shape is that of the moderate bell-shaped leather cap, and the drooping feather plume is at least eighteen inches long. I cannot believe that the proportions are accurate. The coat is of late 1850's cut, the waist easier in fit and the sleeves wider over the forearm and at the hand. The collar is cut back in front in post-1851

fashion, and the waistbelt seems to have a cap pouch on the right side. Only one shoulder belt is worn and that supports the cartridge box; the belt plate is worn on it. No attempt is made to show any design on the plates.

Boyce's coat, or one similar to it, is also in the Missouri Historical Society Museum. It agrees with that shown in the daguerreotype copy. The skirts have no pocket flaps, and the lowest button of the folds serves as the ornament joining the turnbacks. The end of each skirt is $5\frac{3}{8}$ " wide, and the skirt from hip buttons to bottom is $13\frac{1}{2}$ ".

H. Charles McBarron, Jr.

REGULAR INFANTRY OF THE ROYAL DANISH WEST INDIES FORCES, 1830-1837

(Plate No. 27)

The regular forces in the Danish colonies of the West-Indies—the islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. Jan, which since 1917 have been the Virgin Islands of the United States of America—were organized in 1830 in a detachment of artillery and three companies of infantry. The infantry companies, which were unequal in strength, were garrisoned at the following places: *Christianssted, on the island of St. Croix*: 1 captain, 1 first lieutenant, 3 second lieutenants, 14 noncommissioned officers, 3 drummers, and 150 privates; *Frederikssted, on the island of St. Croix*: 1 captain, 1 first and 1 second lieutenant, 6 NCO's, 3 drummers, and 35 privates; on *St. Thomas*: 1 captain, 1 first and 2 second lieutenants, 10 NCO's, 3 drummers, and 190 privates. In Christianssted there was also a band of 16 musicians and a bandmaster (*stabstambour*).

In 1837 the infantry was reduced to two companies as follows: *Christianssted*: 1 captain, 2 first and 4 second lieutenants, 18 NCO's, 5 drummers, 130 privates; on *St. Thomas*: 1 captain, 1 first and 2 second lieutenants, 11 NCO's, 3 drummers and 90 privates. The band remained at its former strength.

Although military service in Denmark was compulsory, recruits for the West-Indies forces were voluntarily enlisted. They had to enlist for at least six years, and during this time only one furlough of seven months to Denmark was granted. After the six years, those who desired to continue were allowed to reenlist for another six years.

The uniforms shown in the picture were introduced in 1830 and were quite different from those worn by the Danish home forces. The *czapka* (headdress) was especially created for the West-Indies forces. It differed

from the *czapkas* normally used by lancers in having a side of the top part, rather than an edge, in front. On this top was the Danish cockade and a silver star with the Danish coat of arms. The coat for NCO's and privates was made of finer cloth and of a better scarlet colour than that used by the same ranks at home. NCO's were distinguished by two or three chevrons of white linen on the cuffs and by a white sword knot. In addition to the white trousers, enlisted men had another pair of light blue cloth like that of the officers, but without stripes.

The officers wore epaulets similar to those for officers in the home service, but they had as special distinctions a shoulder belt of silver and a sash of yellow and crimson silk, two items which in the home forces were reserved for the cavalry and artillery. The long straight sword was introduced in 1837, and to this was fastened the gold and crimson sword knot standard for all Danish commissioned officers. On the silver shoulder belt they wore, on their backs, a pouch of black patent leather with a silver rim and the Royal cypher made of silver on the lid. When on duty with rank and file in white trousers, the officers also had to be dressed in that way.

In levée dress an officer wore a cocked hat with a white feather plume; he also took off the cords and tassels from the *czapka* and wore them as an aiguillette. For undress, both officers and enlisted men had a cap of light blue cloth with a scarlet band and patent leather visor. The officers had no stripes on their undress trousers. In cold weather a light blue great coat with scarlet stand-up collar and scarlet epaulets with white trimmings was worn. The buttons on this coat were of white metal.

Preben Kannik.

2d CONTINENTAL LIGHT DRAGOONS, DISMOUNTED SERVICE, 1780

(Plate No. 28)

The 2d Light Dragoons of the Continental Army was a Connecticut unit, built around a battalion of light horse organized by that state in the summer of 1776. Its commander was Major Elisha Sheldon. When the four Continental dragoon regiments were authorized by Congress in December of that year, Sheldon was commissioned a colonel, and his battalion became the nucleus of the new regiment. Throughout the Revolution it appears to have been stationed in the middle states or in New England.

We are largely indebted to John Trumbull for what little we know of the uniform of the 2d Light Dragoons. He is believed to be the creator of a sketch of Major Benjamin Tallmadge, and he made a delightful miniature of Captain Thomas Young Seymour, both officers of the regiment. He included Captain Seymour on horseback in his painting of "The Surrender of Burgoyne."¹ Trumbull, however, must be used with caution as a source for the cut of Revolutionary War uniforms, particularly in regard to the collar. He painted some years after the War and invariably showed his subjects in the high collar which did not come into use until 1786 or 1787, and then only among the very fashionable. The later his work, the higher he shows the collars and the waists of coats and vests, until in their final stage they are the extreme styles of the 1790's. Trumbull did serve in the War, however, and his portrayal of these dragoons in French type dragoon helmets with light blue scarfs, dark blue coats faced with buff, and buff small clothes, represents almost certainly the regimental dress.

In his *Memoir*, Tallmadge describes the organization of the 2d Light Dragoons in early 1777 and its movements to the end of the War.² He writes about the smart appearance of his own troop in June 1777 as it

rode off to join the main army under Washington, "composed entirely of dapple gray horses" fitted with black leather bridles and with black bearskin holster covers. In the summer of 1780 he was given "a separate command, consisting of the dismounted dragoons of our regiment and a body of horse" wherewith to harry the British around New York. The dragoons were formed for this service into two companies of light infantry and appeared to relish this separate and active type of duty. It is as light infantry that they are shown in the plate, and thus they appeared in their daring exploits at Fort George and at Fort Slongo on Long Island.

For dismounted service of long duration, dragoons in most armies of this period exchanged their heavy boots for infantry footwear and their valises for knapsacks, plus certain other items of foot equipment, but clung to their cavalry helmets and swords. Exactly what Major Tallmadge's men wore in 1780 is not known—and it is probable that no especial uniformity prevailed—but the plate shows at least what would have been normal equipment. The drummer has replaced the trumpeter of mounted service. On his drum is the regimental device as shown on the blue standard of the unit, its motto being "PATA. CONCITA. FULMNT. NATI." (roughly: "When the motherland is aroused her sons thunder in arms.")³

The swords shown are the straight broadswords carried by many regiments of British horse at least to the period of our Revolution. This pattern has been selected since Tallmadge himself speaks of having "a cavalry fight with broadswords" with some British light dragoons the year before. It should not be forgotten, however, that the saber with variously curved blades was also carried by the Continental horse.

H. Charles McBarron, Jr.
Frederick P. Todd.

¹ The Tallmadge sketch is reproduced in *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, XVIII, 303. The miniature and the original of the surrender painting are in the Yale Gallery of Fine Arts.

² Benjamin Tallmadge, *Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge: Prepared by Himself, at the Request of His Children*, New York, 1858, 19, 34.

³ Illustrations of the two surviving standards may be found in Gherardi Davis, *Regimental Colors in the War of the Revolution*, New York, 1907, 12, 13; and Frank E. Schermerhorn, *American and French Flags of the Revolution, 1775-1783*, Philadelphia, 1948, 75-79.

GENERAL STAFF, MASSACHUSETTS VOLUNTEER MILITIA, CIRCA 1840 - 1850 (Plate No. 21)

In 1840 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts took the step which almost all other states were to take in the mid-19th century, that of eliminating its enrolled militia, and concentrating its attention exclusively on its uniformed Volunteers. This step was authorized by an act of the Legislature dated 24 March 1840 which provided that the militia of the Commonwealth should consist only of volunteers, not to exceed 10,000 men.¹ Under this legislation an order was adopted in council on 24 April which disbanded the then existing common militia divisions, brigades and regiments, and reorganized the Volunteers into three divisions, of six brigades. Thus, at one stroke, Massachusetts wiped out the common militia which had existed alongside the Volunteers since the early days of the Colony.

The six Volunteer brigades included two battalions of cavalry, two regiments and six battalions of artillery, and eleven regiments and two battalions of light infantry. These were all uniformed corps; the units in Boston and vicinity were included in the 1st Brigade, 1st Division. A circular dated 24 April 1840 was addressed to all the commanding officers and informed them of the new changes. The reorganization was carried into effect with considerable dispatch, and the existing Volunteer corps were, with few exceptions, incorporated into the new system.

General Orders No. 3, Adjutant General of Massachusetts, specified the uniform to be worn by the staff and by all of the units of the Commonwealth. The companies were directed to procure this uniform but at their request were given ample opportunity to use up the distinctive dress that they were wearing.

¹ Charles W. Hall, ed., *Regiments and Armories of Massachusetts*, 2 vols., Boston, 1899, I, 121-130. This valuable study quotes the pertinent orders verbatim.

For the General Staff the order specified:

Major General: Coat dark blue, double-breasted, two rows of buttons, nine in each row, to be placed by threes, stand-up collar to meet and hook in front. Cuffs—two and one-half inches deep, and to button with three small buttons, to button at the under seam, pointed cross-flaps to the skirt, with four buttons, equally distributed, with buff turn backs, with a gold star on buff cloth on each skirt; two hip buttons to range with the lower buttons on the breast; collar, cuffs, and facings of skirt, buff cloth; lining, buff; buttons gilt, ornamented with the crest of the arms of the state. Epaulettes—gold, with two silver stars on the straps.

Hat—cocked without binding, black ribbon on the two front sides, black silk cockade, ornamented with a gold loop, and a silver spread-eagle; tassels, gold. Plume—white and black, black tip half the length, drooping from an upright stem eight inches in length. Trousers—dark blue cloth with a buff stripe down the outer seam, one and a half inches wide, and welted at the edges. Sword—straight gilt hilt; sword knot, gold; sword belt, black patent leather; plate, gilt.

Sash—buff, silk net. Gloves—buff. Spurs—yellow metal or gilt.

Brigadier generals wore the same uniform but with ten buttons placed in pairs, red and white plume, and one silver star on each epaulet. Adjutants general wore this uniform, but with a white plume. The staff wore single-breasted coats, red sashes, gold cord aiguilettes, and the same plume as worn by their general; the buff on their blue collars extended only four inches back on either side. Aides-de-camp wore the same dress as staff officers, but with yellow plumes. White linen or cotton trousers replaced those of blue wool from 1 May to 30 September for all ranks.

These uniforms were very similar to those specified for the General Staff of the Regular Army in the dress regulations of 1834 and 1841, and the plate could, with minor variations, serve for any state of the Union at this period.

H. Charles McBarron, Jr.

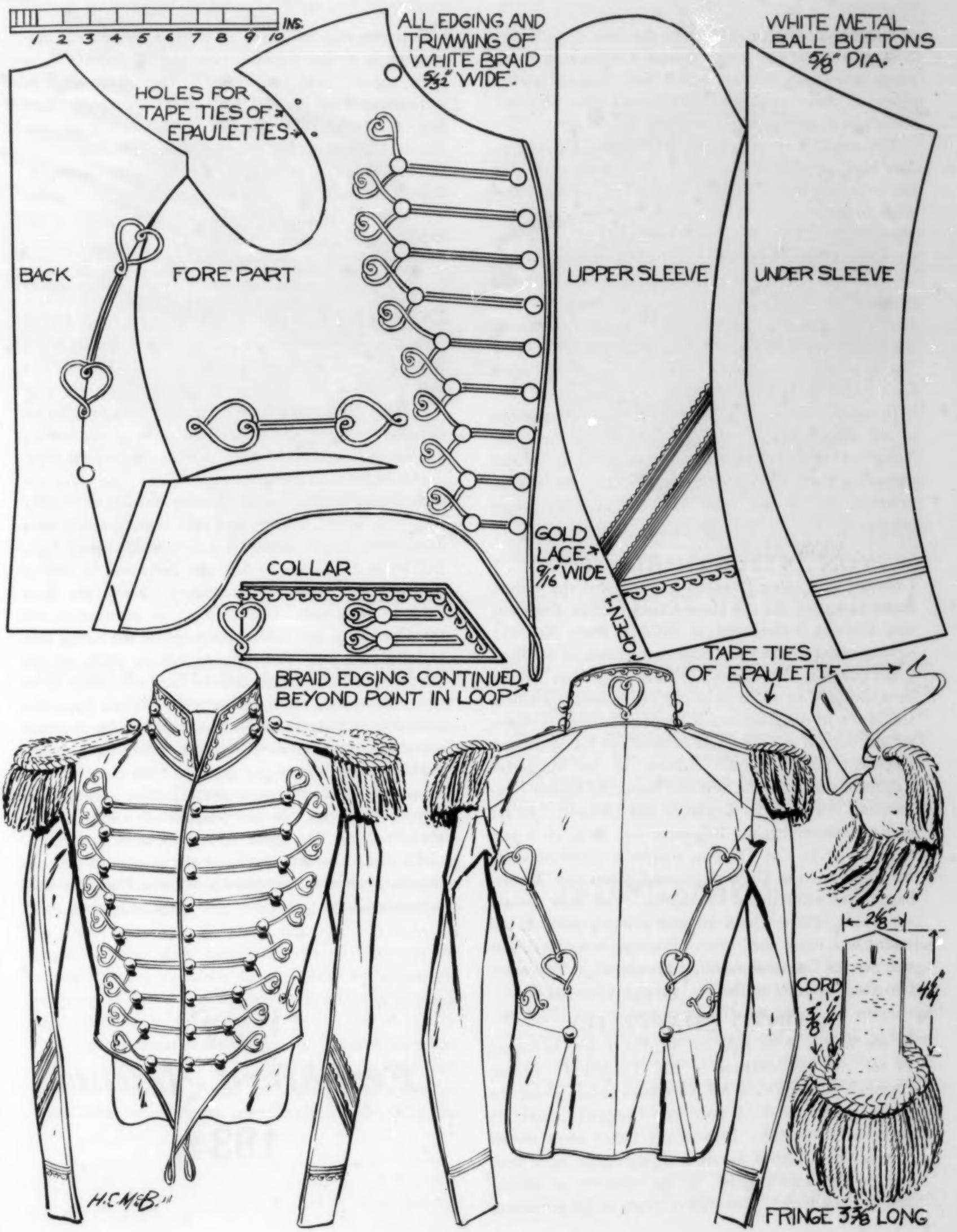
COLLECTOR'S FIELD BOOK

LIGHT DRAGOON JACKET CIRCA 1825 - 1830

The jacket illustrated on the opposite page belonged to a somewhat eccentric costumer and antique shop proprietor. I made the sketches, upon which I base the present drawings and pattern, a good many years ago, and they are not as satisfactory as I could wish. The man has since moved and may be out of business. I tried to buy the outfit when I made the sketches, but he would not sell. All I was able to discover about the uniform was that he had bought it a good many years

before from an old lady who said it had been in her family as long as she could remember, or words to that effect, and that reduced circumstances forced her to sell.

The pattern of the jacket is somewhat suggestive of the 1830's to 1840's except for the back pieces, which are wide at the waist, and the large size collar running low on the chest. The complete absence of padding or wadding anywhere in the jacket is further proof of its pre-1830 manufacture. A helmet that came in the box with the jacket bore a Philadelphia label; the jacket has the rather 1840 type epaulettes affixed, but a pair



of wings were also in the box at the time of purchase. If there had not been other unrelated items in the box (such as a cheap red, white and blue, hanging feather plume of rather modern type), I would have supposed the wings to be the proper shoulder ornaments.

The material of the jacket is a rather light weight, dark blue broadcloth; the skirt is lined with dark blue silk or taffeta and the sleeves with white muslin. The trimmings are of 5/32" white braid and the buttons are white bullet about $\frac{5}{8}$ " in diameter. The collar has no stiffening other than an interlining of some coarse red material resembling woolen. The construction is perfectly soft throughout in the manner of the pre-1830's. It was made for a man with about a 36" chest; the sleeves at the hand are very small, measuring exactly 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " in circumference, the back seam being left open for a distance of 3" up to admit the hand.

In many respects this jacket resembles descriptions of one worn between 1815 and 1833 by the First City Troop of Philadelphia, and illustrated in a colored engraving made by C. G. Childs in 1823. At present, however, we do not have sufficient evidence so to identify it.

H. Charles McBarron, Jr.

VON DITFURTH REGIMENT

I noticed in reading *Phantom Fortress* that the author, Bruce Lancaster, has the Hesse-Cassel Fusilier Regiment von Ditfurth (illustrated in *MC&H*, Plate No. 19) serving under Colonel von Bose at the battle of Guilford Court House in Carolina in 1781. In this he has perhaps been confused by a change in *chefs* or honorary colonels, and hence in designations, of several Hessian regiments which occurred in 1778. One of these saw the Musketeer Regiment von Trümbach changed to the Musketeer Regiment von Bose, the new *chef* being the former commanding officer of the Regiment von Ditfurth. As far as I can determine, the Regiment von Bose, or a part of it, under Lt. Col. Du Puy, fought at Guilford while the Regiment von Ditfurth, under Colonel von Westerhagen, was wintering at Charleston. Von Bose himself appears by then to have become a major general, but where was he at the time? The von Bose Regiment was part of Cornwallis' army surrendered at Yorktown. Can these facts be verified?

Lt. Col. S. G. Brady.

ALONZO CHAPPEL(L)

In the March 1950 issue of *MC&H*, I was interested to see the reproduction of Mr. Craighead's Alonzo Chappell painting, and Mr. Peterson's article about the painting and artist. I note that Chappell's dates are given as 1820-1885. Because my father owns several originals by Chappell, we made a pilgrimage, some years ago, to the artist's grave, in the cemetery at Middle Island, Long Island. The date of death on his gravestone

is December 4, 1887, aged 59 years, 9 months, and the surname is spelled thereon with two "ll's" (though it often appears with only one). That death date is authenticated by the obituary in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* for Tuesday, December 6, 1887, which states that Alonzo Chappel (with one "l") died on Sunday (i. e. the 4th) at his house at Middle Island. In Herman H. Diers' "The Strange Case of Alonzo Chappel" in *Hobbies* for October, 1944, vol. 49, pp. 18-20, the dates 1828-1887 are also given.

*Dorothy C. Barck
Librarian, New York Historical Society*

INFANTRY CARTRIDGE BOX, 1834

I noted with interest the excellent page in Vol II, No. 2 of *MC&H* relative to the Infantry Cartridge Box of 1834 as I have had one of these in my possession for over ten years. Unfortunately my box is in very poor order, the linen parts being missing and some of the leather too, but to compensate for this it bears the original sling.

Mr. McBarron's guess on the subject of the sling was undoubtedly logical, and it is quite possible that some such were issued, but my specimen bears the following dimensions, length about 68 inches, width varied from 2-3/16 to 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches in the wide parts and $\frac{7}{8}$ inch at the narrowest part of the tongues. There are three holes in each end. Lest I forget to mention it, the shoulder belt is buff leather whitened on the facing side, and the belt plate now missing left its mark on this receptive surface. Its dimensions must have been about 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ vertical by 2-5/16 inches wide. When I got this ensemble it had obviously been replaced by the later round eagle type of the Civil War. The loops (brass) evidently were spaced the same in both cases as there seemed to be no alteration in the belt to accommodate them. The holes for this purpose are arranged horizontally about 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches from the nearest tip.

To clinch the authenticity of the sling, it is stamped on the reverse side as shown below. The date itself is very indistinct.

Robert L. Miller.

**U. S.
Frankford Arsenal,
1834.**



Hessian Cartridge Box ornaments; Regiments Erbprinz (left) and Von Bose (right).

HESSIAN CARTRIDGE BOX PLATES

The two Hessian cartridge plates illustrated herewith were excavated by the National Park Service on Yorktown Battlefield. Both are embossed brass. One bears a crowned lion, rampant, with the "Grand Hessian Arms" on a star. The other has a crowned lion, rampant, on a pedestal which bears the letters "F L Z H" (*Friedrich Landgraf Zu Hessen*).

Photographs of the plates were sent to Mr. Herbert Knoetel in Berlin for identification. Mr. Knoetel replied that both plates were very interesting because none exist in Germany today. However, since the plates on the grenadier caps were usually similar to those on the cartridge boxes and since the cap plates are all known, he believed that it was possible to identify the cartridge box ornaments by that means.

Using this form of deduction, Mr. Knoetel identified the plates as follows: The one bearing the lion with the "Grand Hessian Arms" he attributed to the Regiment Erbprinz, since the grenadier plate also bore that

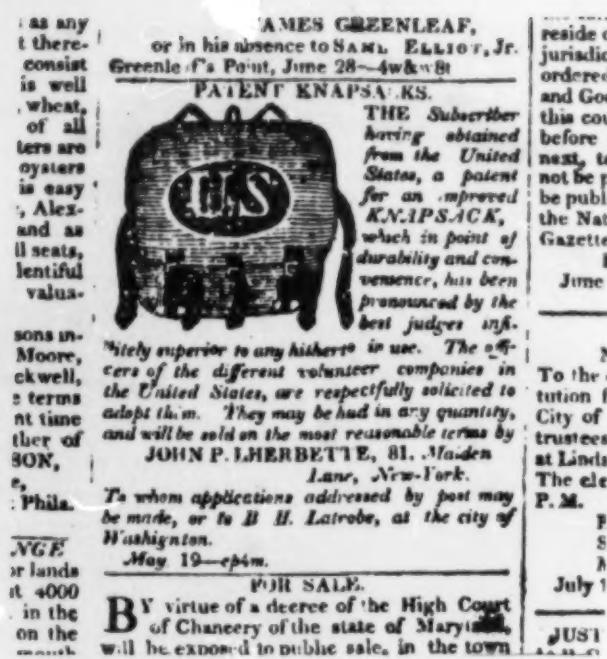
device. The plate with the lion on the pedestal he assigned to the Regiment Von Bose (Trümbach). The identification of this second plate was not so clear-cut because the cap device was not exactly similar. The cap plate bore a lion on a pedestal of trophies and three small grenades. Nevertheless Mr. Knoetel felt that the similarity was close enough to permit an identification.

Harold L. Peterson

PATENT KNAPSACK, 1809

The following advertisement from the Washington, D. C. *National Intelligencer* for 19 May 1809 is one of the earliest American pictorial indications of the knapsack as worn squarely across the back instead of diagonally under one arm. The material of which the knapsack is made is not given, but it would probably have been a painted canvass. Unfortunately there is no information on the extent to which this pattern was used

Frederick P. Todd



Advertisement in the *National Intelligencer*
(Washington, D. C.), 19 May 1809

NATIONAL LANCERS, BOSTON CIRCA 1890

Reproduced on the opposite page is a small oil painting in my collection, done by Scott Leighton, a native of Maine, who was quite well known throughout New England during the post Civil War years of the 19th century. His specialty was "Horses."

Mr. Leighton has made the two soldiers of secondary interest to their mounts. One trooper (left) wears the standard government regulation cavalry full dress of the period, while the other wears the special ceremonial full dress of the National Lancers—red coat, schapka, etc. Both uniforms being well known, no further descriptions need be given. The Lancers, formed in 1836, are now the 180th Field Artillery Battalion.

One feature of this painting seems to deserve some adverse criticism from the writer, who incidentally is not an equestrian and has not "forked a hoss" since World War I. I refer to the size of the saddles, which definitely seem to me to be in the juvenile equipment category. Certainly, I think they would be too small to accommodate the well upholstered sitters of these swanky Boston Militia cavalrymen of the Gay Nineties.

A. M. Craighead.

GAZETTE

As a part of the Sesqui-centennial of the National Capital, the Corcoran Gallery of Art has presented a show of paintings that is important to all students of American military history and antiquities. Entitled "American Processional, 1492-1900" the show traces American history through the media of prints and paintings by artists who were contemporary with and often witnesses of the scenes portrayed. Dr. Hermann W. Williams, Jr. and his staff have combed the pictorial repositories of the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Europe and have succeeded in borrowing many paintings never before exhibited in this country.

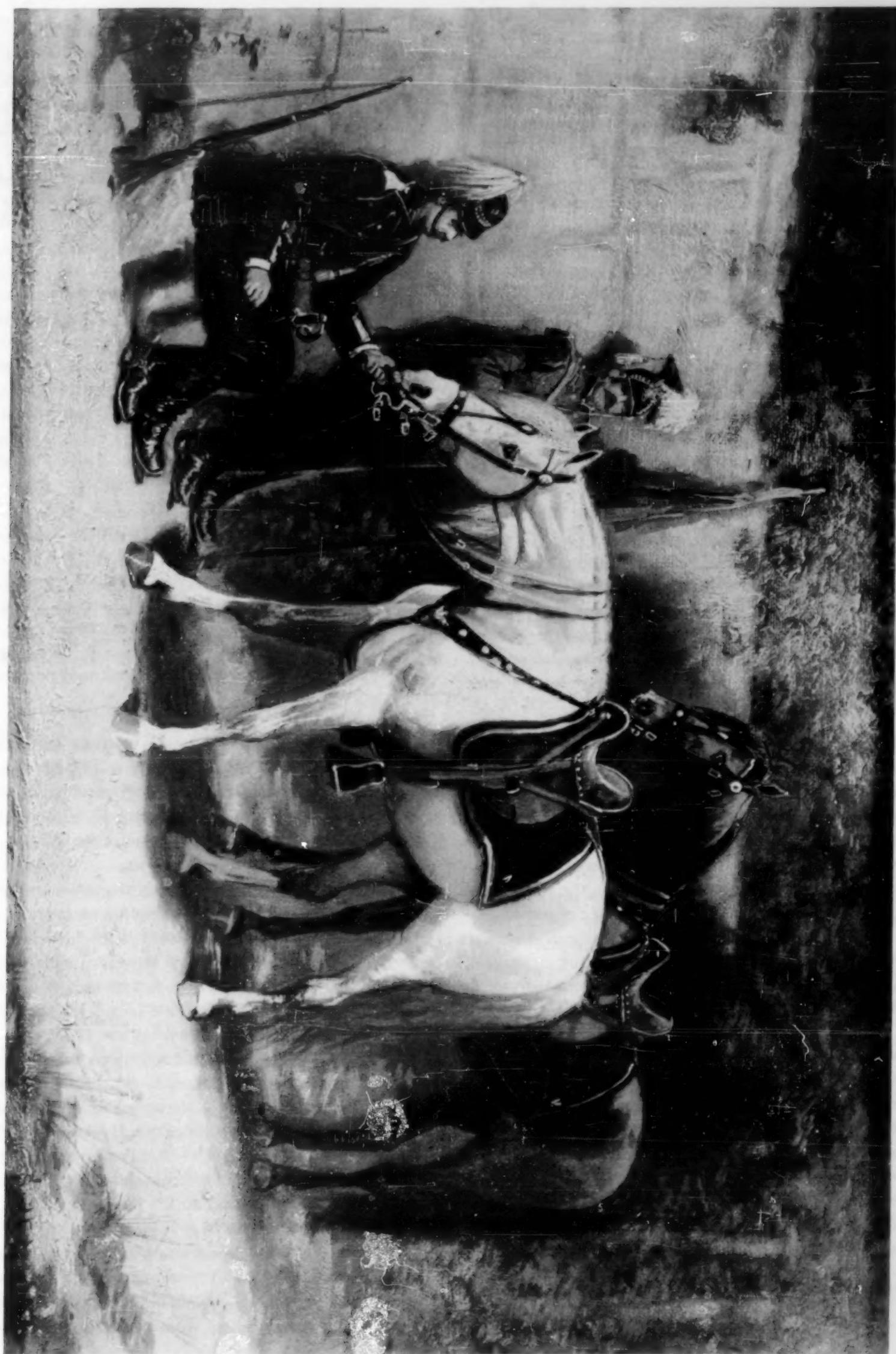
It would be manifestly impossible to mention all of the pictures which are of interest from a military historical viewpoint, but some are worthy of particular notice. Viewing the show in a chronological manner, one comes first to the beautifully detailed painting of the death of Wolfe by Benjamin West. Most of us have been familiar with this scene for as far back as we can remember, but no reproduction has ever done justice to its magnificent color or more than barely indicated the wealth of detailed information on costume and equipment it contains. It is certainly one of the outstanding paintings at the show.

There is so much on the American Revolution that it is hard to find one painting of more interest than the rest. The Doolittle prints are there along with paintings by Charles Willson Peale and James Peale and a most interesting rendering of the Battle of Princeton by William Mercer.

Continuing, there is one of the Kemmelmeyer paintings of Washington reviewing troops at Fort Cumberland, Maryland, in 1795 and a painting of the Battle of North Point by Thomas Ruckle the elder. Then, Thomas C. Savory's painting of the National Lancers of Boston in 1836 which has much interesting information. Another picture containing many unusual details is James Walker's spirited composition of Scott reviewing his troops in 1847. Some of these details, however, are open to considerable question.

There are forty-three drawings and paintings relating to the Civil War. Outstanding among them are the Fort Sumter paintings by Conrad Chapman and four seldom-seen Winslow Homers.

Almost at the end comes the Spanish American War, which is high-lighted with six black and white drawings by William J. Glackens and the, familiarity welcome Frederic Remington, "The Scream of Shrapnel at San Juan Hill, Cuba, July 1, 1898."



National Lancers, Boston, circa 1890.

The "American Processional" will be on exhibit until December 17. Another historical exhibition devoted primarily to portraits is being held simultaneously at the National Gallery of Art. More detailed comments on its content will appear in the next issue.

★ ★ ★

We were taken, some weeks ago, to Haussner's Restaurant (corner Eastern Avenue and Clinton Street) in Baltimore by one of our subscribers. He seemed strangely reticent, we thought, about trying to put into words what we were to experience, and on arriving we saw why. The place defies description, for it is far more noteworthy as an art gallery than an eating place. A large restaurant, every inch of its wall space and much of the floor was filled with objets d'art, chiefly historical genre paintings of the late 19th century; at the same time its food was fine and its service efficient. Occupying a prominent position was a splendid painting by Edouard Detaille, "After the Skirmish."

This reminds us also to mention, and recommend, another restaurant, this time in New York City. It is Le Valois, located on Madison Avenue near 60th Street. Its cuisine is superb, but to our mind the chief attraction is a little upstairs room where the host has hung his collection of French military paintings. Discovering a collector of this type of art is unusual enough, but having him a first-class restaurateur to boot is truly remarkable.

★ ★ ★

The story of the American uniform (and all that goes with it) still lies buried, in the main, in libraries, archives, warehouses, dump heaps, and countless private homes. The raw materials of the story are not necessarily lost. They are known probably—piece by piece—to many people, but they have yet to be gathered together to make sense. At least we can say that the location of much of the required material is a matter of record.

It would be idle to count on discovering an American "Bourgeois of Hamburg"—some painstaking collector of a past generation who has amassed our materials for us—although that is not impossible. Interest in American military dress and equipment was uncommon in former times. But there are a myriad fugitive references in books, and pictures in private hands, that would each form a link in our chain of knowledge if they could be sought out one by one and added to the whole. To many collectors this digging for new items (whether literally or figuratively) has real fascination, and it is for these explorers that the *MILITARY COLLECTOR & HISTORIAN* will from time to time set forth such projects as occur to its Editors. At the same time, it plans to report on all projects under way that promise to broaden our field of information.

The first suggestion deals with local military dress and insignia and can concern just about everyone. If in the area in which you live there existed one or more volunteer militia companies, somewhere nearby are probably photographs or portraits of their members, old journals and orderly books, and actual examples of their uniforms. Local newspapers are an excellent source as are local histories. Old timers can help, and your town or county historical society could be a mine of information if you have time to explore it.

Relatively little is known about the various militia uniforms of the years prior to 1917. One should not expect to find glamorous or colorful regalia; the fact that the local unit wore the Federal uniform is itself worth knowing. This was often the case. Usually there were only minor variations of insignia, and these variations are important. At present almost as little is recorded about the National Guard uniforms of 1900 as about those of a century earlier.

The *MILITARY COLLECTOR & HISTORIAN* would welcome information of this type. It would be good to have photographs or careful sketches of single items, and the more closely they can be identified and documented, the better. If detailed study can be given the subject, and the story of the dress of a single unit for a definite period of time can be sent in, all the better. At least we hope some of you will look into this project and send us a report.

★ ★ ★

The small company of military historians has suffered great losses in the last few months. Within a short space of time, death came to three internationally respected leaders in the field: Stephen H. P. Pell, of the United States, Rev. Percy Sumner of Great Britain, and Dr. J. Clarence Webster of Canada.

Stephen H. P. Pell's life was characterized by his devotion to the protection and reconstruction of Fort Ticonderoga. Intensely interested in the fort from early boyhood, Mr. Pell took the first steps in the long process of preserving and rebuilding the historic structure in 1909. Today, after forty-one years of continuous work, the great fort is almost completely restored. The creation of the Fort Ticonderoga Association (a non-profit organization devoted to the preservation of the fort) almost twenty-five years ago gives assurance to us today that the thousands of people the world over who have come to share some of Mr. Pell's enthusiasm will be able to continue to visit this shrine which has now also become a monument to his memory.

In addition to his work at Fort Ticonderoga, Mr. Pell found time to maintain many other historical interests and to make a notable military record. He served on board the U. S. S. *Yankee* in the Spanish American

War, receiving the Sampson Medal for Santiago and the West Indian Campaign Medal. In 1916-17 he served in the French Army and was made an officer of the Legion of Honor. He also received the *Croix de Guerre* with star and palm, the French Service Medal, the Combatant and Reconnaissance Medals. After the entry of the United States into the War, he served with the American Army, receiving the American Service Medal, the New York State Conspicuous Service Cross, and the Purple Heart. Death closed this distinguished career of seventy-six years on June 23.

On February 3 the Rev. Percy Sumner died in England at the age of 75. He was one of the earliest members of the Society for Army Historical Research and one of its most prolific contributors. He was interested in presenting documented facts rather than polished articles, as every reader of the *Journal* of that Society knows, but these contributions show the great depth of his research and scholarship. His collection of notes and pictures on British military costume was enormous, at one time probably the largest in the world, and full of amazing items. About it and about its creator we hope to have more to say in the future.

In Canada, death came to Dr. J. Clarence Webster in his 87th year, on March 16. After he gave up a

distinguished medical career in 1919 he devoted all his vast energy to Canadian history and particularly to its military aspects. He founded and became President of the New Brunswick Museum. In its issue of 17 March the *Montreal Gazette* paid Dr. Webster this tribute:

The old bygone years, that time had clouded and covered, were brought back into the light by his informed and painstaking work. His collection of relics of Gen. James Wolfe was the finest in the world. He toured London and Paris and other centres of the Old World, looking about in antique shops and in old bookstalls, and finding many a treasure that had been quite forgotten.

Dr. Webster worked tirelessly to preserve the massive ruins of old Fort Louisbourg. But his special work was at Beausejour, where he restored the old fort of the French Regime, and founded his museum, which is now one of the most interesting in Canada.

But more than this, the work he did was inspired by a sense of its national importance. The meaning of these long labors of his later years might best be expressed in the words of another great Maritimer, Joseph Howe: "A wise nation preserves its records, decorates the graves of its illustrious and fosters national pride and love of country by perpetual references to the sacrifices and glories of the past."

It is with some interest that we reflect upon the full measure of years to which these collectors and historians lived. And we warrant none of them knew a dull moment in that time, a moment that lacked for something of pleasure to do.

NOTES ON PUBLICATIONS

John E. Parsons, *The Peacemaker and its Rivals*, William Morrow & Company, New York, 184, (\$4.00), has just come off the press. A sound, scholarly study, it presents a lucid history of the single action Colt revolver. The Peacemaker was issued widely to United States cavalry forces in the second half of the 19th century, and many infantry and artillery officers purchased them for their personal weapons. Included in the class of "rivals" are the Remington, the Smith & Wesson, the Merwin Hulbert, and the Forehand & Wadsworth, many of which were issued to U. S. forces and purchased by militia.

The National Park Service published this spring, as Number One of its "Historical Handbook Series:" *Custer Battlefield*, by Edward S. and Evelyn S. Luce. This 34 page booklet is splendidly illustrated with maps and photographs and contains a succinct account of the fight and its aftermath. It may be purchased for 15 cents from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington 25, D. C.

The Art Cellar (L. J. Brown & Co.) of 45a Hanover Street, Edinburgh, Scotland, has for sale at about \$1.13, a series of full colored postal cards of figures of various Scottish regiments from 1798 to 1918. The figures are selected from the celebrated set of statuettes carved in

Scots Oak and colored by Mr. C. d'O. Pilkington-Jackson for the Scottish Naval and Military Museum in Edinburgh Castle. The statuettes themselves are discussed in the *Journal* of the Society for Army Historical Research, Spring and Autumn 1933 (vol. XII, 57, 183).

Although all have been in print for at least two years, readers should be reminded that these small and inexpensive, yet valuable British publications can still be secured from their publishers:

James Laver, *British Military Uniforms*, London: Penguin Books, 1948. This "King Penguin Book" No. 42 contains 32 pages of text and 24 delightful full color reproductions of contemporary uniforms plates, 1742-1895.

Major T. J. Edwards, *Military Customs*, Aldershot: Gale and Polden, Ltd., 1948. An unusually interesting and comprehensive study of British and Colonial army customs, with much on the origins of the numerous distinctions in dress, on regimental mascots, colors, and traditions in general.

George F. Collie, *Highland Dress*, London: Penguin Books, 1948. Another "King Penguin" which contains a brief account of the national dress of Scotland and reproduces color 24 plates from McLan's *The Clans of the Scottish Highlands*.

Any of these can be ordered through your local book store. More recently published in great Britain:

Major R. M. Barnes, *A History of the Regiments & Uniforms of the British Army*, London: Seeley Service & Co., Ltd., 1950 (30 s, plus postage). Additional information about this book, which is described as containing 220 uniformed figures in full color, can be secured from Forster Groom & Co., Ltd., 23 Craven Street, W. C. 2, London.

The Truxtun-Decatur Naval Museum has published a catalog of its spring and summer 1950 exhibition titled *Commodores Thomas Truxton and Stephen Decatur and the Navy of Their Times*, printed at The Spiral Press, New York, 1950. It contains eight pages of photographs of naval paintings and objects and describes numerous other items. Copies may be secured from the Secretary, Naval Historical Foundation, 1610 H Street, N.W., Washington 6, D.C., postpaid, for one dollar.

★ ★ ★

An interesting monthly publication has appeared in West Germany under the title *Symbol und Wirtschaft*. It is intended primarily as a trade organ for designers, manufacturers and retailers of insignia, flags, medals and uniforms of all types. The first issue of the first year appeared in January 1950 with 16 pages of short notes in German and several black-and-white illustrations. The February issue contained a greater number of illustrations and more items of significance to amateur collectors.

To give some idea of the coverage of this magazine, we reproduce the titles of a few of its articles; "The Coats of Arms and Flags of All Countries" (a continued series), "Modern French and Belgian Decorations," "Danish Insignia and Uniforms," "The German Model Soldier Industry," "The Fabrication of Insignia for Occupation Forces," "British Decorations for the War of 1939-1945," "The Flag of the Pan-European Movement," "Flags of Luxembourg," and "What is a Flag and What is a Color?"

Annual subscription is 14.40 Deutsches Marks (about \$5.00), and may be secured by writing *Symbol und Wirtschaft*, Paul Presuhn, Ebstorf Kreis Uelzen (Hanover), Germany.

As a rule *M C & H* does not mention articles in magazines devoted specifically to subjects of a military historical nature. Occasionally, however, articles of especial interest to our readers appear in magazines on the periphera of the field, and it is felt that they might well be mentioned in this column. The following articles fit into this category:

Harold L. Peterson, "Body Armor in the Civil War," in *Ordnance*, XXXIV, No. 180 (May-June 1950) 432, 433, is a brief, well-illustrated account of the use of armor by both the Union and Confederate armies.

Raleigh Buzzard, "Insignia of the Corps of Engineers," in *The Military Engineer*, XLII, No. 286, (March-April, 1950) 101-105, is an interesting discussion of the development of the present insignia of the Corps of Engineers.

Dr. Roger Shaw, "Mars in Full Dress," in *The Military Engineer*, XLII, (May-June 1950) 213-15 gives a compressed account of uniforms throughout history and adds a few words about their social significance. No pictures; a useful article even if some facts and some deductions are open to question.

Richard J. Koke, "History Written with Pick and Shovel," in *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly*, XXXIV, (April 1950), 140-48. Describes the work and products of the Field Exploration Committee of that Society since its organization in 1918, and of such members as William L. Calver, Dr. Edward H. Hall, and Reginald P. Bolton. Of especial interest is its promise of "the Bolton and Calver studies of military buttons, belt plates, badges, and other campsite relics" in a single handy volume, to be published soon by the Society.

The Military Collector & Historian is published quarterly by the society of the same name, and at the present time it is mailed to all subscribers to a series of hand-colored prints of American military and naval costume, insignia, arms and equipment. The subscription price of the entire publication is \$17.50 a year. The text alone without the prints may be purchased for \$4.00 a year. Both plates and text are published without profit, and no officer of this society receives any remuneration.

All requests for information concerning subscriptions should be addressed to Mr. C. A. de Bodisco, Assistant Treasurer, 357 Benefit Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

All correspondence concerning the publication itself should be addressed to the corresponding editor, Colonel Frederick P. Todd, 4119 W Street, N.W., Washington 7, D.C.

THE EDITORS: MRS. JOHN NICHOLAS BROWN, MAJOR J. DUNCAN CAMPBELL, DETMAR H. FINKE, H. CHARLES McBARRON, JR., HAROLD L. PETERSON, COLONEL FREDERICK P. TODD.

